

Westlake Landfill Community Engagement and Use of Technology Study
Region 7 Environmental Justice
April 2, 2013

Background: Region 7 Environmental Justice staff were asked to gather information regarding effective community engagement with those in the immediate area surrounding the Westlake Landfill Facility and to consider how the use of technology might be included and/or potentially enhance communication with community members. The goal of this work would be to gather information that might help Region 7 ensure a direct and healthy line of communication with those in the immediate area around the facility and the rest of the community.

This information gathering exercise was developed with input from Superfund, the Office of Public Affairs (community involvement coordinator), and the Office of Regional Council. It is intended that the exercise and the information gathered as a result would support Region 7's Community Involvement Plan for Westlake Landfill. This information gathering exercise is not meant to be a scientific survey, but was meant to gather information from a representative sample of persons within the immediate area surrounding the facility in order to gain insights which might further enhance EPA Region 7's community engagement activities. This is a dynamic product and is subject to change as increased information becomes available.

The Community Involvement Program (CIP) is designed to keep the public informed of site progress, establish appropriate communication venues, and provide opportunities for public input during site activities. The primary goal is to involve the community in site cleanup decisions as required by the Superfund law. EPA R7 will strive to achieve the following objectives through the implementation of the community involvement program.

Objectives from the CIP

1. Share site information with the community on a timely basis and in non-technical language.
2. Encourage and publicize opportunities for community input regarding site activities and proposed cleanup plans.
3. Notify local officials, residents, and businesses in the site area before field work or other site actions take place.
4. Maintain site information in the community and make it accessible to all interested residents and other stakeholders.
5. Increase the level of awareness and understanding of the Superfund process and specific activities involved in the process

Westlake Landfill Community Involvement Plan, October 2011

OPA and EJ offices gathered information from residents and stakeholders who live and work in the immediate area around the facility regarding effective approaches for community engagement and opportunities to integrate the use of information technology as a tool.

Approach:

The Instrument - In order to gather comparable information from a cross-cutting section of the focus area, a list of questions was developed which could be asked of each individual. The questions were developed to gather information regarding:

- 1) how people currently receive information,
- 2) where they currently receive information,

- 3) whether they are satisfied with the level of availability of information, and
- 4) The level of openness to receiving information in new or different ways.

Please refer to Table 2: The Westlake Landfill Survey Results Summary Table for the list of questions each stakeholder was asked.

Identification of Participants - Consistent with the *National Environmental Justice Advisory Council's Model Plan for Public Participation*, a list of stakeholders was identified as a sample/representative group. Refer to (<http://www.epa.gov/projectxl/nejac.htm#GUIDING PRINCIPLES>) to review the National Environmental Justice Advisory Council's Model Plan for Public Participation. The plan recommends engaging the following communities in public participation processes:

- ☐ Community and Neighborhood Groups
- ☐ Educational Institutions and Academia
- ☐ Environmental Organizations
- ☐ Government Agencies
- ☐ Industry and Business
- ☐ Medical Community
- ☐ Non-Governmental Organizations
- ☐ Religious Communities
- ☐ Spiritual Communities

Region 7 EJ staff compiled a list of persons representing the stakeholder groups listed above which were located in the immediate area around the facility. Persons were identified through their participation in Westlake Landfill facility informational meetings hosted by the EPA as well as during door to door meeting notifications and conversations with EPA staff.

An initial 24 individuals were identified to conduct telephone interviews. Five of these agreed to be interviewed.

Note: In order to better answer the question of opportunities to use technology in community engagement additional information was gathered from the broadband service provider in the area.

Implementation: Calls were made to individuals on the "Westlake Landfill Potential Interviewees" document. This list represents stakeholder sectors identified above. Responses to the interview questions are listed in Table 1 and Table 2.

Table 1: Survey Response – Community Residents

Question			
1. How do you currently receive information regarding the Westlake Landfill?	Communicate with Manager of Landfill	Flyer or by USPS mail	I go to the landfill website http://www.westlakelandfill.com
2. How do you prefer to receive information pertaining to Westlake Landfill from the EPA?	I would like to see the city government be more involved in this matter	USPS mail	From the landfill website http://www.westlakelandfill.com
3. Do you have internet access?	Yes	No	Yes
4. Would you feel comfortable getting information from EPA regarding the Westlake Landfill through a) e-mail b) Text message c) Facebook updates d) Web-site updates e) Twitter f) Direct mail g) Public meetings h) Other (please list)	a) Yes b) No c) No d) No Answer e) No f) No g) Yes h) No Answer	a) No b) No c) No d) No e) No f) Yes USPS g) No h) Door to Door flyers	a) Yes b) No c) No d) Yes e) No f) Yes g) Yes h) No answer
5. If EPA were to offer online town hall meetings about the Westlake Landfill would you be interested in accessing it? a. Yes, and I have access either in my home or through other means and would not need further assistance in order to access the town hall meeting. b. Yes, I would like to access on-line town hall meetings, but do not have internet access at home. c. No, I am not interested.	A. Yes.....I am your typical resident here in West Lake, I am a computer guy and do everything online. I speak to a lot of elderly in this area and a lot of them would not be able to attend these virtual meetings.	C. No....I am not interested	A. Yes...I have access in my home or by other means.

Question			
6. Does your neighborhood have internet access?	Our only neighbors are [REDACTED] and they do not have access due to lack of interest in the internet.	Yes. My neighbor [REDACTED]	Yes
7. Is there anything you would ask of us?	I'm glad you (EPA) are on the case, it seems to have been forgotten in most peoples' minds and I think there needs to be a better openness. I applaud the meeting in January and welcome more.	Not that I can think of.	No, not that I can think of.
8. Do you have anything to add?	Electronic communication in Bridgeton is iffy at best. They do not use the internet too much in this area due to elderly age.	I appreciate you getting information out to the community; I am disabled and cannot move around outside of my house. It is important to me to know what actions are being taken.	I attended the Simon Law Firm meeting. They set me up for a one on one but I cancelled when I heard what they had to say. They seemed to be changing what the State (MDNR) and the EPA had been telling us. I didn't feel that it was right so I withdrew my name. It seemed to me that they were preparing for a class action law suit.
9. Is there anyone else in the community we should talk to?	[REDACTED]	Not that I can think of.	Not anyone that comes to mind.

Table 2: Westlake Landfill Survey Results – Community Organizations – Summary Table

Question	Pastor John Shear	Computer Village
1. Do you have responsibility to communicate with residents in the area near the Westlake Landfill site? If so, please describe how you communicate (i.e. mail, email, text, website, etc.)?	Yes. We are a church and it is a topic of discussion. We've received information through TV media, newsprint, and radio stations. Much more has been provided in print.	Yes, I have been with Computer Village for 27 years and am commonly referred to in the community as the "Computer Guy."
2. Are you aware of the level of internet access of most residents and if so, can you tell me about that?	I can tell you that roughly 200 of our congregation that do not have internet access.	It is lower on the bell curve than you might think. Mostly due to the economic hardship. They may have access to the internet but lack the skill set needed to access the world wide web. Also Maybe due to income per capita, lower achievements in school, fewer computers in the home, or they have the computer but it is not in proper working order.
3. Can you describe your electronic communication with local residents, if any (email, text, facebook, twitter, website, etc.)?	Facebook page, and a weekly email that goes out to everyone on the list.	We use email, Facebook, and twitter and we also teach technology skills by operating out of 23 different locations. We work with students from ages 4 to 104 years of age. We work a lot with summer programs working together with parents and children. Our program focuses more on math and science as we teach computer skills.

Question	Pastor John Shear	Computer Village
4. Are people responsive to your electronic communication and do they take actions when communicated with using electronic mediums (i.e. attend events, take actions at home, participate in activities)?	Yes, people are responsive to the electronic communication.	We have a set schedule and most of it is advertised by word of mouth, as well as our Facebook and twitter accounts. We also collaborate with a lot of different organizations whether it is public housing, NAACP, or local officials. In doing so, we also like to have our classes in a location we know people are going to be able to make it to the classes.
5. When you advertise events and activities using a website, email, or text what is the level of responsiveness?	We use our Marquee/LIT board that is used to advertise special events. We also print flyers and send those out to most retail outlets that are smaller stores that allow us to distribute. We also have McDonalds that allows us to place them in their store, which we all know receives a large amount of daily traffic.	We have a set schedule and most of it is advertised by word of mouth, as well as our Facebook and twitter accounts. We also collaborate with a lot of different organizations whether it is public housing, NAACP, or local officials. In doing so, we also like to have our classes in a location we know people are going to be able to make it to the classes
6. Which electronic medium do you think is most successful when communicating with local residents?	I think that for our congregation, it would be our weekly newsletter more than Facebook, only because I feel that more people check their emails more than they check their Facebook accounts.	Facebook
7. Do you communicate with residents in the area using email and if so, how effective is it?	We do occasionally have an email set up so that people can send emails and communicate with the Church; there is usually a great response to this set up. Another thing that works for us well, such as a funeral, we send out an email request for assistance from our church family.	Again, most of our customers already know of our presence and use word of mouth to gather information.

Question	Pastor John Shear	Computer Village
8. Does your facility have equipment available for the public to help with computer accessibility and/or do you have space to host electronic meetings?	We ended up buying a former Circuit City building for our church and rent out the other space; we use 15k or the 30k square feet.	Yes, we have over 20 locations with over 40 teachers. As I stated, we attempt to take the education to the community, and not have the community come to us.
9. Is there any advice you can give me regarding what works and doesn't work both electronically and in other formats when communicating with this community, based on your experience?	Prior to me going into pastoral work I was in politics and am very familiar with St Louis County and how information gets out. The most effective way I can recall is that we had people get involved in town hall meetings. I would imagine that since this is an issue that affects people on a day-to-day basis and by also going through the elected officials, then you can get the message distributed.	I believe that a virtual meeting and virtual information can work in this community. However, in order to do so, you will need to change the culture of the community pertaining to seeking information. You will need to go to their housing offices, elected officials, and any other avenues in which the community gathers information and bombard them with the approach you want to take. Initially you may not receive the response you are looking or aiming for, but it will take some time to change the culture.
10. Is there anything you would ask of us?	Again, because of my background in the county politics as well as my current position in the community, please feel free to use me as a direct contact person going forward, we have a great facility that would house 80 and a sanctuary that would house over 200 people. Please keep us in mind when you are planning on coming down and searching for your next meeting room.	I feel that I am not the best person to speak on this matter because I am always going to be behind something that pushes for more education in the communities. This is my life, teaching with modern technologies and attempting to assist the public. I feel that you can get the community to adapt and that this is a great idea.

Question	Pastor John Shear	Computer Village
11. Do you have anything to add?	Here's my take on it, and again I bring my experience into this. The community that is affected by the odor in Bridgeton is probably much older than the rest of the county. That said, this community is more about face to face. Now that's not to say that they wouldn't attend a virtual meeting, you need to focus on smaller groups, even skyping in would work. I wish I had the magic answer, and even though the community is capable; there is a feeling that, especially in politics, the community wants to see the presenter in person.	See questions #10
12. Is there anyone else in the community we should talk to?	I can think of several, but here is my contact information if you need to reach me. I would really like to be a point of contact in the future if you are needing to speak to anyone in this area.	You should speak with [REDACTED] who works with me at Computer Village. He has been very instrumental in trying to get environmentally focused classes into our communities.

Additional Information:

The research team also took into consideration a study performed by the PEW Research Center on Internet and Public Life. A study on the digital divide was used alongside the Bridgeton results. The PEW study shows identical results to that of the R7 research.

Social Media: Internet sites with specific information to the Westlake Landfill were reviewed as well as sites focused on other environmental concerns which were of high importance to the community. Sites such as Facebook and Twitter have become a very popular platform for community members seeking information regarding Westlake Landfill.

Summary of Preliminary Findings:

Note: Due to the small number of survey responders the findings should be considered preliminary. It is the recommendation of the EJ team that additional surveys be conducted to ensure a clear picture of engagement needs and best practices.

- ☐ Bridgeton, Missouri, lies on a fiber trunk and has excellent accessibility to the internet
- ☐ Many Bridgeton residents are using IT (Facebook, websites, other Internet sources) to gain information regarding Westlake
- ☐ Multiple IT platforms may be integrated into a successful community engagement approach at this site.
- ☐ Some community members may lack accessibility to connect to various platforms of communication particularly electronic forms of communication.
- ☐ Some community members may find the use of information technology to receive updates regarding the Westlake Landfill Facility challenging due to lack of knowledge and experience using IT tools.
- ☐ Challenges with the use of IT in community engage include lack of home computers.
- ☐ Community organizations are willing to make their facilities available for training and to host community engagement activities.
- ☐ Organizations which conduct community trainings and work to bridge the digital divide are available and currently active in the Bridgeton area.
- ☐ Disabilities which impair the ability to use IT communication tools were a concern of some residents.

It is recommended that a virtual town hall meeting and the use of other IT platforms be integrated into traditional face-to-face community engagement approaches in this community. Using electronic platforms allows the region to speak or communicate with the public directly. We have gathered information which shows that a “lack of communication” creates fear on the part of community members. Community members feel that there has been a lack of communication in the past. Increasing communication (which may include the use of IT tools) will ease the fears of the community and allow the region to discuss the approach that the agency will be taking. Please note: community members continue to value face to face communication and this should be retained as an integrated approach is considered. Teamwork between the community, the state, and the EPA is necessary to ensure successful community engagement. A meeting is currently being arranged for the first week of May so that R7 can reach the community as soon as possible.